

The Purpose and Aim of Creating the Human

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The Creation of Humankind

One of the truisms the Qur'an has presented is that humans were not created in vain, void of any aim or purpose.

God said: "*Did you suppose that We created you aimlessly, and that you will not be brought back to Us?*" [23:115]

He also said, "*Indeed to your Lord is the return*" [96:8].

Also: "*O man! You are labouring toward your Lord laboriously, and you will encounter Him.*" [84:6]

Therefore, encountering God and returning to Him is the aim that an individual was created for. The verses that assert this reality are manifold.

God said, "*So whoever expects to encounter his Lord let him act righteously, and not associate anyone with the worship of his Lord.*" [18:110].

He also said, "*Indeed those who do not expect to encounter Us and who are pleased with the life of this world and satisfied with it, and those who are oblivious of Our signs - it is they whose refuge shall be the Fire because of what they used to earn.*" [10:7-8].

How to Achieve the Goal

Hence, the following enquiry is posed:

How can an individual achieve this goal? Also, what is the path that leads to meeting the Exalted God?

In response [to the enquiry], we say that the individual is created in the realm of trials and tests; God said, "*He, who created death and life that He may test you [to see] which of you is best in conduct.*" [67:2].

Therefore, everything in this realm is for [the purpose of] testing an individual. From this point, God placed [the individual] on a crossroad so that the individual is able to choose the path, which he desires. God said, "*Indeed We have guided him to the way, be he grateful or ungrateful.*", also "*whoever wills (to believe), let him believe; and whoever wills (to disbelieve), let him disbelieve.*" [18:29]

Thus, if a person was able to stand on the path that leads him to the goal for which he was created, then he is amongst the guided, otherwise he is astray. Building on this fact, the person prays to his Lord numerous times in his daily [obligatory] prayers [with the following]: "*Guide us on the straight path.*" [1:6] Due to the fact that (1) the best and shortest of paths to reach the [desired] goal is the "straight path"; and (2) failing to walk on this path mandates that a person is inevitably astray; then traversing does not but drive him further from the goal. Imam al-Şādiq [p] pointed to this fact in his saying: "*He who acts without insight is similar to the person who walks astray from the [correct] path, whereby walking hastily only drives him further*" (Uşul al-Kāfi, Abī Ja'far Muḥammad bin Ya'qūb bin Işhāq al-Kulaynī al-Rāzī, the book of "The grace of knowledge", chapter of "he who acts without knowledge," ḥadīth 1.)

The Meaning of the "Straight Path"

So what is the "straight path" that the wayfarer must journey on to reach the proximity of God and encounter Him?

The Qur'an clarified this path wherein God says, "*Say, 'If you love Allah, then follow me; Allah will love you and forgive you your sins, and Allah is all-forgiving, all-merciful'*" [3:31]. Also, "*In the Apostle of Allah there is certainly for you a good exemplar, for those who look forward to Allah and the Last Day, and remember Allah greatly*" [33:21].

It is evident that all the prophets, headed by the seal of prophets and messengers, are the ones whom God guided to the straight path. God says, "*And We gave him Isaac and Jacob and guided each of them. And Noah We had guided before, and from his offspring, David and Solomon, Job, Joseph, Moses and Aaron, thus do We reward the virtuous * and Zechariah, John, Jesus and Ilyas, each of them among the righteous * and Ishmael, Elisha, Jonah and Lot - each We graced over all the nations * and from among their fathers, their descendants and brethren. We chose them and guided them to a straight path. * That is Allah's guidance: with it He guides whomever He wishes of His servants.*" [6:84-88].

Based on the aforementioned, the "straight path" that leads to God, Exalted is He, is following the seal [of prophets]. This does not occur but via taking everything that we received from him. God says, "*Take whatever the Apostle gives you, and relinquish whatever he forbids you*" [59:7] due to the fact that he [p] "*does not speak out of [his own] desire: it is just a revelation that is revealed [to him]*" [53:3-4]

The Method of Following the Prophet

The noble Messenger [p] specified how to follow him in order to walk on the "straight path" and be saved from straying [from the right path] in the following narration: "*I have left amongst you that which if you hold unto you will never become astray after me: the Book of God, a cord stretching from the heaven to earth, and my progeny (Ahlul-Bayt). They will not separate until they meet me at al-ḥawḍ, so look at how you treat them [after me].*" The Prophet [p] explains that being saved from straying [occurs] by simultaneously holding fast to the Qur'an and the pure progeny [p]. For this reason we recite in the invocation: "*O God, acquaint me with Yourself for if you do not I will not become acquainted with your Prophet. O God, acquaint me with your Prophet for if you do not I will not become acquainted with your [Divine] Proof¹. O God, acquaint me with your [Divine] proof for if you do not then I will stray from my religion.*" Therefore, what saves the human from staying, and thus becoming guided to the "straight path" is becoming acquainted with God, the Messenger and the [Divine] Proof in every era.

Physical or Spiritual Ascension?

The Qur'an illustrates another reality concerning the human being wherein it states, "*We certainly created man in the best of forms; then We relegated him to the lowest of the low*" [95:4-5]. Thus the human lives in the lowest of the low in the temporal realm, therefore he must ascend from the low to the high after the goal becomes apparent to him, "*To Him ascends the good word, and He elevates righteous conduct*" [35:10]. This ascension is not physical but spiritual. Ascending [can] either [be] physical, such as the case of the human ascending to an elevated land; or it [can be] spiritual, such as the case of Prophet Idris [p] whereby God addresses him, "*and We raised him to*

a station exalted." [19:57] Which does not refer to physical elevation, rather the elevation of his status before God the Exalted.

The Cord of God

Based on the aforementioned, we find that the Noble Qur'an and the narrations of the Noble Prophet [p] mentioned that this elevation requires a cord. God says, "*Hold fast, all together, to Allah's cord, and do not be divided [into sects]*" [3:103] In order to discover the cord that God commanded us to hold fast to we again refer to ḥadīth al-thaqalayn² which is mutawātir³ amongst the two sects⁴ so that we discover the reality of this cord and what it refers to?

In his famous speech at al-Khayf masjid during ḥujjat al-widā'⁵, the Messenger of God [p] said, "*I am leaving among you two weighty things: the Qur'an - the greater weight,- and the lesser weight which is my 'itrah and household. They are the cord of God stretching between you God Almighty. If you hold fast to it you will not go astray.*"

Whereby the Great Prophet [p] describes the Qur'an and 'itrah as one cord and not two. This means that holding fast to the 'itrah is not distinct from holding fast to the Noble Qur'an. Rather, they compose one reality, but the difference between them is that the 'itrah are the vocal Qur'an, whereas the Qur'an is the silent 'itrah. For this reason Imam al-Sadiq [p] when explaining the following verse, "*This Qur'an, assuredly, guides to that which is most upright*" [17:9] says, "*It guides to the Imam.*" This clarifies the meaning of what Imam Ali [p] said, "*That is the silent book [the Qur'an], and I am the vocal book.*" He does not mean by this that he is the spokesperson of the Qur'an, he rather meant that he is [in fact] the embodiment of the Qur'an. For this reason, it has been related by the two sects (Sunni and Shi'i) that the Messenger of God [p] said, "*Ali is with the truth, and truth is with Ali, it turns with him wherever he turns,*" meaning that the truth turns wherever Ali turns because he is the vocal Qur'an; the living embodiment of God's book within the reality and life of the people. Based on that, we are able to conceive what has been mentioned in Tafsīr al-'ayyāshī by Imam al-Sadiq [p] whereby he says, "*The straight path is the commander of the faithful [Ali].*" Also, what has been mentioned in Al-Ma'ānī by Imam al-Sadiq [p], "*It [the straight path] is the path to knowing God, and it is two paths: a path in the [temporal] world and a path in the hereafter. As for the path in the [temporal] world, it is the Imam that is obliged to be obeyed. Whoever knows him in the [temporal] world and follows his guidance will pass on the "path" - which is a bridge over hellfire in the hereafter, and the foot of whoever is oblivious of him in the [temporal] world will slip in the hereafter thus falling into hellfire.*"

Also what has been related by Imam al-Sajjad [p], "*There is no veil between God and His Proof nor a concealment beneath him [His Proof]. We are the doors of God, the straight path, the chamber of His knowledge, the interpreters of His revelation, the foundations of [His] Unity, and the disposition of His Secret.*"

Provision for the Journey

After it has been established that the human is striving towards the Exalted God, that (s)he is laboring to reach proximity to and meeting God, and that this can't occur but via following the Qur'an and the pure 'itrah whom are the ascending cord to the Glorified Him has become lucid, the

Qur'an indicates the provision for this journey towards the Divine wherein it states, "*And take provision, for indeed the best provision is Godwariness.*" [2:197] The Commander of the Faithful [p] said, "*O' creatures of God! I advise you to be God-wary which is the provision (for the next world) and with it is (your) return. The provision would take you (to your destination) and the return would be successful. The best one, who is able to make people listen has called towards it and the best listener has listened to it. So the caller has proclaimed and the listener has listened and preserved.*"⁶

The Noble Qur'an has indicated that the best mount that the human can ride on in order to reach his goal is standing vigil (in Prayer) through the night. God says, "*And keep vigil for a part of the night, as a supererogatory [devotion] for you. It may be that your Lord will raise you to a praiseworthy station.*" [17:79], and, "*Stand vigil through the night, except a little * a half, or reduce a little from that * or add to it, and recite the Qur'an in a measured tone.*" [73:2-4].

Conclusion

What has been concluded thus far is that the best mount for the human to ride on to journey towards the Exalted God is standing vigil (in Prayer) through the night; and that the best provision is God-wariness; and that the best path is the straight path. Therefore, the role of God-wariness in the life of the human and its position in the Islamic legislative system becomes lucid, for in many cases the emphasis on God-wariness is asserted without its position and station in the life of the human clarified to the wayfarer towards God.

[1] This refers to the infallible Imam [p] from the Prophets progeny. (Trans.)

[2] Previously mentioned in the article: "I have left amongst you that which if you hold unto you will never become astray after me: the Book of God, a cord stretching from the heaven to earth, and my progeny (Ahlul-Bayt). They will not separate until they meet me at al-ḥawḍ, so look at how you treat them [after me]." (Trans.)

[3] Meaning that it has been abundantly repeated in many different sources. (Trans.)

[4] Referring to the Shi'ite and Sunnite sects. (Trans.)

[5] Literally: the farewell pilgrimage. This was the final pilgrimage that the Prophet undertook before his departure from the temporal realm.

[6] Nahjul Balagha, Sermon 113.

* Source: هدف وغاية خلق الإنسان, Hadaf wa Ghāyat Khalq al-Insān, Ayatullah Sayyid Kamal al-Haydari.